

Selectboard Site Visit and Special Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 1, 2018 at 6:15 pm at Poplar Hill Cemetery (site visit); 7pm at the Calais Town Offices

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), John Brabant (Vice Chair), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Sharon Winn Fannon (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Jerome Lipani, Fletcher Dean, Reed Cherrington, Jim Barlow, Paul Mascitti, Juanita Nunn, Laura Brown, Jennifer Whitman, Andrew Christiansen, John Simanskis

1. Site Visit at Poplar Hill Cemetery: Attendees made a walking tour and visual inspection of the cemetery, including inspection of bank erosion.
2. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
3. Public Comment: None.
4. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
5. Meet with Cemetery Commission regarding Poplar Hill Cemetery (PHC): Andrew Christiansen, Laura Brown and Paul A. Mascitti, Poplar Hill Cemetery Association (PHCA), and John Simanskis, Fletcher Dean, Juanita Nunn and Jennifer Whitman and (Calais Cemetery Commission) attended. The Chair explained that PHC is a non-profit cemetery, and the Town oversees cemeteries that fall under the “municipal” category. The PHCA reported that the cemetery was established in 1872 and was the first non-profit registered in the state of Vermont. A series of recent storms caused serious erosion damage that their funds could not cover (a ballpark estimate on erosion control came in at \$100,000); no caskets were compromised, but the bank continues to further erode.

The Board and guests discussed expenses and maintenance, use of U-32 volunteers, erosion and comparison of fee schedules. They discussed the room remaining for cremains and casket plots and the perpetual care costs. In the early 1900’s their fund was established, and during recent scanning of their archives, the PHCA learned that up until 1959, families with plots paid a yearly fee for mowing, and a yearly fundraising effort brought in money. In 1959, most of the fundraising letters had been returned undeliverable. Succeeding PHCA boards lost institutional memory of fundraising efforts, including that the Association had received non-profit status in the 1960’s. They considered that implications of municipality vs. non-profit status in grant preference.

Town Attorney Jim Barlow advised on potential outcomes to the Association dissolving, including who the successor may be (the Town, another non-profit, or another private association that runs cemeteries). They discussed options for both the PHCA and the eroding

bank; John Simanskis suggested contacting the Army Corp of Engineers for utilizing their work.

The groups discussed challenges of bringing in new board members, and potentially utilizing the Vermont Old Cemetery Association grants. Fletcher Dean commented on the potential urgency of the bank failure; the PHCA clarified that their remaining three members are considering retiring from service. They discussed the need to determine what the risk is of bank failure reaching the closest the gravestone and whether plots need to be moved to get a truck in there to work.

The Selectboard, Cemetery Commission and PHCA developed a plan for moving forward over the near future, and outlined the following action steps:

- The PHCA will reach out to the East Montpelier Selectboard to inform them of the situation;
- The PHCA will submit a social agency Town Meeting appropriation request to the towns of Calais and East Montpelier which will allow paying for the next year's costs while working toward a bank failure solution;
- Calais' Selectboard Chair will reach out to East Montpelier Selectboard and Cemetery Commission to discuss having a joint meeting regarding a solution
- Additionally, the option of utilizing the Army Corp of Engineers will be investigated. Clif Emmons added that there may be available funds for preserving the Civil War veterans' monuments and gravesites that are in PHC.
- The PHCA will email their bylaws to the Selectboard.

Sharon Winn Fannon commented acknowledging the constraints of the three remaining PHCA members in terms of time and energy.

The groups discussed that the cemetery is in Calais but is right across the line from East Montpelier and in the North Montpelier community, having served the East Montpelier community for years.

Fletcher Dean reported that the Old Fairview Cemetery (on the Calais-Marshfield Road) stones are a good example of the appearance of markers that have all just been cleaned.

The Selectboard appreciated the hard work of the PHCA Commissioners and thanked them for their efforts bringing this forward to the Board.

The groups decided that the Town of Calais will not immediately take over PHC; the Association will take the next steps in securing funding for maintenance. The Town Attorney reviewed the process that would be formally required to dissolve an association (this Plan of Dissolution can be found in V.S.A. 11B, Chapter 14).

John Brabant proposed having a member from the Cemetery Commission of each town appointed to the PHCA to increase the support for this work; Juanita Nunn agreed to serve.

6. Adjournment: John Brabant made a motion to adjourn at 8:12 pm. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 5-0.

Date: 10/1/2018 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 10/15/18 meeting

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<https://drive.google.com/open?id=19oqKLfChMmSqPSn0LVGX39uennUo6i-L>